

The City Under Paris

By STERLING HEILIG.

"It is astonishing how those American tourists get to know so much," complains M. Lamy of the Underground Inspection. "Parisians do not ask to see the catacombs. But tourists run to them in crowds—and when they get down there they criticize!"

"I do not blame them," answers the Municipal Councillor. "That bone pit ought not be obtruded on our visitors. It is a disgrace to Paris."

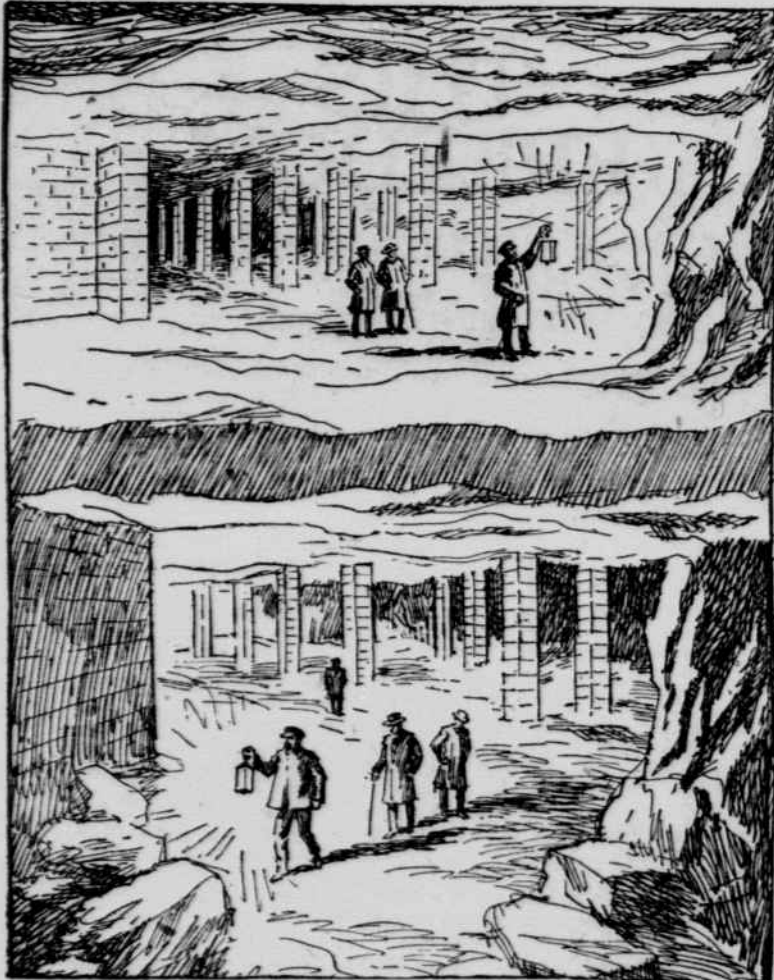
"Then why do they come sightseeing

of Paris are greater in extent than those of Rome, more grandiose in execution, of more varied romance.

Beaux Arts, Municipality and Prefecture of the Seine are getting together to open them up and find—goodness knows what they will not find down there. It is a world!

The catacombs are the antique quarries from which old Paris was built.

They were there from the beginning, when Gallo-Roman legates and prefects built their forums, palaces and the first



into the bowels of the earth? What do they expect to find?"

"Here is a story Charles Lenormand told us when he took a municipal party through the old subterranean vaults of the Louvre," explained the City Father. "When Henri became King he was curious to know if the old story of a passage under the River Seine was true. His workmen started clearing from a point Lenormand showed us, where steps cut in cream colored stone lead down beneath the lowest palace vaults to ancient catacombs, unsafe at present.

"The King's workmen came to an iron studded door. The part is now caved in. Forcing the door, they found a furnished room where a man of gigantic stature sat at a table, leaning his head on his palm. A rush of fresh air blew the seated figure to dust. Who was it? No one has ever guessed. Even the clothes disappeared to powder. But a big box of jewels on the table furnished 14,000,000 francs, with which Henri IV. commenced his prosperous reign, because the treasury was empty on the death of Henri III."

"Does Lenormand, the archaeologist, believe that?" asked Inspector Lamy.

"He thinks that the story may be more or less embroidered, though undoubtedly the jewels were found. The point is this: The catacombs are here, beneath our feet. They are the oldest thing in Paris, untouched, sealed up, and all Paris history tells about romantic and mysterious things connected with the catacombs. Tourists know it, in particular the American tourists who criticize your bone pit. Why not show them the real catacombs?"

So the controversy started and has grown.

Why should the catacombs of Rome be a first class tourist attraction and the catacombs of Paris remain unknown, except for a short, gretsome section full of human bones from ancient Paris cemeteries? The true, clean, virgin catacombs

walls of the city. This is no exaggeration. Vast subterranean streets still exist, totaling 200 acres, between the Observatory and the Jardin des Plantes, from which were taken stones that entered into the earliest temples, palaces and public and private buildings.

The Paris of before Charlemagne—towers, more walls, fortifications!—was quarried underground to build high into the air. In the days of Joan of Arc there was already a subterranean labyrinth under half of then Paris—extending into suburbs which are now Paris—which were already a forgotten mystery!

They sought the soft cream stone where it ran. Fantastic streets, their smooth stone ceilings eighty feet below the surface, emptied into vast, cool "rotundas," turned, crossed, intersected, without plan, according to the quality of the stone. Gallo-Roman galleries were forgotten in Gothic times. In the Renaissance they had forgotten the Gothic galleries!

The known extent of this underground world is astonishing. Up to the twelfth century the palaces, churches, houses, walls, &c., were built from quarries under 1,500 acres of the present surface in three vaguely known groups: (1) Under the Gobelins Quarter. (2) under the Latin Quarter and (3) under the north side of the river, the whole Trocadero Quarter. Also, another thing is certain. The Chaillot Catacombs, extending directly beneath our American Embassy Chancellery, ran at one time into the Faubourg St. Honore.

In them the Carbonari, to which Napoleon III. had belonged in his adventurous youth, had their secret lodge rooms when he became Emperor, and through these catacombs, it has always been said, they found their way to the vaults of the Elysee and actually visited the Emperor at night to impose their will upon him.

That was why Napoleon III. quit the Elysee.

President Millerand to-day could make a similar visit to Ambassador Herrick.

Skip across Paris.

The walls of Louis XIV. and much of the old boulevard quarter were built from stone of the Montmartre catacombs, about which they are talking in connection with the Black Bands at this moment.

Here for the first time the subway goes under certain of the catacombs. And all the Paris Tenderloin is built above them. Montmartre is a hill, you see, and galleries running into it and through it for nearly three miles, they say, in one case are being utilized by a "business" organization handling merchandise obtained on fraudulent credit. Drayloads of boxed goods enter certain courtyards in plain daylight and disappear. No search can find them. They have gone down concealed lifts to a little railroad track that runs through one of these catacombs, five blocks, ten blocks—away below the deepest cellars—to another ward division. Some honest commission merchant hoists them up and mingles them with other invoiced goods, all ready for shipment.

The Prefect of Police, asked to investigate these injuries to commerce, replies that the catacombs are unexplorable. Nobody knows their extent, he says. In built up Paris such a search would be impossible complicated. The police would waste their time penetrating to unknown labyrinths.

No map of subterranean Paris exists, apart from the book of Dunkel, incomplete and reduced. In Dunkel's book sixty-three entrances to explored catacombs are marked, apart from the "bone pit" inflicted on tourists. The stairways leading down to them have regularly from 80 to 130 steps.

What do tourists see to-day? It is an outrageous sight. It is more lugubrious and melancholy even than the Catacombs of Rome! Here tourists see human bones—an incalculable mass of human bones from ancient Paris cemeteries, stored in this section of the catacombs to get them out of the way! In fact, they have nothing to do with the historic Paris catacombs!

The thing is grandiose, but horrid. Down there sleep the dead of Paris of all ages; vague multitudes and great men; canonized saints and robbers hanged at Montfaucon. Merovingian kings keep silence beside victims of the Commune. Valois, Bourbons, Orleans and Huguenots mix with a thousand beggars from the Cour des Miracles, the pell-mell victims of the massacre of St. Bartholomew and tranquil Paris family folk who died in their beds.

But it is not the catacombs.

How exploit this vast subterranean city beneath Paris for tourists?

Tourists have an instinctive craving to go poking underground. The romance of the catacombs is notorious. In the uncertainty and violence of the Middle Ages and the turmoil of the Renaissance the possession of subterranean routes assured mysterious impunity to rich families. Joseph Mery in his "Salons et Souterrains" says that the religious wars caused Paris property owners to excavate more into the earth than they built above it.

There were always the catacombs to dig to.

When they reached them they had part access to the subterranean city.

Here is something which I know of my own knowledge: A widow, friend of my mother's, has a house in the Boulevard St. Michel which dates from the Renaissance. It has a small, ancient garden with venerable carved stone benches, and a great stone well whose carved curb, breast high, surmounted by valuable old ironwork, has

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